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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 000084

DEPARTMENT FOR DS/IP/AF, DS/TIA/ITA, DS/IP/SPC/SO, AF/E,
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/10/2029
TAGS: [ASEC](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ER](#)
SUBJECT: ERITREAN AIRMAN MURDERS MILITARY GUARDS

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for Reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) An Eritrean airman reportedly murdered six air force guards on March 6. He had recently been arrested for desertion and was being held with other deserters at the air force base adjacent to the Asmara international airport, pending transportation to his unit in Massawa. The airman was able to overpower one of the armed sentries, took his AK-47 and killed six sentries before killing himself. The embassy source obtained this information from a family member of the airman who stated the airman was extremely stressed about being arrested and "was close to a mental breakdown." The same source said many air force personnel were angered not at the killing, but rather that the gunman targeted fellow national service conscripts instead of high ranking Air Force officers. Thus far, there has been no mention of this in the Eritrean media.

¶2. (C) Comments: Military desertions are common as many conscripts have been forced to serve open-ended commitments, some for more than 10 years. Using both general roundups and targeted arrests, the GSE routinely conscripts those who have not completed their national service.

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